



Standards and Indicators of Program Quality

Introduction

In Nashville and across the nation, high-quality out-of-school-time programs are being recognized for the valuable contributions they can make to young people's growth and development. Youth who spend their out-of-school hours in safe and nurturing learning environments are at significantly lower risk for truancy, emotional stress, poor grades, substance abuse, and crime or victimization. Participating in high-quality afterschool activities on a consistent basis has proven to benefit young people socially, emotionally, and academically.

Afterschool providers in Nashville are committed to improving the lives of young people, and many commendable programs already exist. With limited resources and little coordination, they have struggled to deliver high-quality programming to the large number of youth, particularly early adolescents, who need it. Fewer than 10% of our 21,000 Metro middle school students participate in afterschool programs regularly, i.e., at least 3 days a week. Our charge as a community is to expand those opportunities and sustain them for the long term.

With substantial support from the Metro Council, thanks to the leadership of Mayor Karl Dean and Director of Schools Jesse Register, the Nashville After Zone Alliance (NAZA) is being launched in early 2010 to address the systemic barriers that afterschool providers face, to increase their visibility, and leverage greater support for their important work. Metro agencies and an array of nonprofit organizations have joined the effort, beginning with the development of a shared set of principles of Positive Youth Development that have evolved into these Quality Standards.

More than a dozen youth-serving providers convened as the Quality Standards Work Group. They scanned the country for existing afterschool standards to draw upon. They are deeply grateful to their predecessors in Vancouver, Grand Rapids, Colorado, New York, Kentucky, but most especially the Providence After School Alliance, which freely shares its expertise and experience and from whom NAZA liberally plagiarized. The Tennessee Department of Education 21st CCLC staff have also been a great resource.

How to use the Standards and Indicators

The NAZA Standards and Indicators of Program Quality are:

- A set of clear expectations that many people have agreed on
- A commitment by these people to give youth access to a wide range of enriching experiences reflective of Nashville's five principles of Positive Youth Development:
 - 1) Promote a Sense of Physical, Social and Emotional Safety.** Youth must feel as though the adults in this setting will protect them from any harm. They also must feel they are valued and accepted by the group.

- 2) Encourage Relationship Building.** Young people need many *supportive* long-term relationships to help them navigate their adolescence. They need guidance from caring adults as well as emotional and practical support from their peers.
 - 3) Foster Meaningful Youth Participation.** Youth must have an active role, voice and choice in shaping their experiences. They must have the opportunity to practice and develop leadership skills, and they must know their contributions are valuable.
 - 4) Provide Opportunities for Building Purpose.** Young people must live purposefully and contribute in meaningful ways. Creating opportunities for youth to become involved in the community and for community members to interact with youth is a powerful way to foster a sense of purpose and develop positive values.
 - 5) Engage Youth in Learning Experiences that Build Healthy and Valuable Life Skills.** Young people need opportunities for experiential learning and practice that will help them build skills needed to succeed in every area of life.
- A guide to help youth-serving providers assess what they are doing well and where they need to make improvements
 - A set of guidelines that, when adopted, can act as an assurance to funders and sponsors that the programs they support will deliver high-quality services

Quality standards are designed to act as a means against which programs can measure themselves and work toward continuous progress and improvement. In a general way, they outline what can reasonably be expected from an afterschool program that is truly dedicated to providing the best possible services. Over time quality standards also can help educate the community as a whole about what high-quality programming looks like and how it can be achieved. Ultimately, they give everyone a common language for discussing where Nashville stands in terms of its commitment to Positive Youth Development through afterschool programming – and where we need to go.

However, the development of standards alone cannot change the quality of a program or the skills of program staff and volunteers. The Workgroup has identified assessment strategies that providers can use to evaluate their work, set goals and track improvements over time. Other tools give youth and their families formal opportunities for feedback. NAZA will provide ongoing support and resources to help afterschool providers reach their quality improvement goals through professional development, training and technical assistance. In addition, NAZA will offer a data collection and tracking tool to measure the impact programs are having on young people's lives.

These supports are part of a comprehensive plan to provide more high-quality afterschool opportunities for Nashville's youth, particularly its MNPS middle school students. By supporting programs that are constantly striving to strengthen their own work, we are ensuring greater success for our youth.

How to understand the format

The Standards and Indicators are organized into five categories. Each category name is bolded and underlined. Within a category, each standard is in bold with the associated indicators below it.

Afterschool programming and activities take many forms. A library may offer unstructured free-time in its teen room. A nonprofit may provide a 12 hour per work comprehensive program at a middle school, with a highly structured schedule, including academic remediation, physical activities, and a menu of arts or mentoring options. Some are responsible for maintaining a physical space. Others stop by someone else's site to provide music lessons, tutoring, sports, or graphic design classes. As a result,

even though all of the standards are broad enough to apply to any NAZA provider, the indicators are not a “one-size fits all” proposition.



The “biggest tent” denotes that the indicator applies to all types of programming and activities. It reflects a best practice or is an indicator of Nashville’s 5 principles of Positive Youth Development.



The “middle-sized tent” indicators reflect Nashville’s principles of Positive Youth Development, but they are not universally applicable. For example, a provider dropping in to provide classes in fashion design at a community center would not be responsible for certain indicators related to the physical environment; the community center itself would be responsible for the physical environment. Each program needs to determine for itself which “middle-sized tent” indicators apply. Many of these indicators would also be required to be competitive for 21st CCLC funding through the Tennessee Department of Education.



The “little tent” indicators have been included as a convenience to those providers who wish to align their programs to become competitive for 21st CCLC funding through the Tennessee Department of Education. The Quality Standards Workgroup would not otherwise have included them, because they do not link directly to Nashville’s principles of Positive Youth Development.

NAZA's Standards and Indicators of Program Quality

Health, Safety and the Environment

The program space provides an atmosphere of welcome, comfort, ownership, and respect for youth and their families.



Program space reflects the interests of youth; it allows them to take initiative and explore their interests.



Program space and atmosphere reflect the diversity of participants.



Heat, ventilation, noise level, and light in the indoor space are comfortable and can be controlled (e.g., through adjustable blinds, open windows, fans).

Youth are physically safe in program space.



Smoking and drug/alcohol use are not allowed on program premises and in programming space.



Policies and protocols are in place so that staff/volunteer verbal and physical interactions with youth are appropriate. For example, staff/volunteers may not be alone with a youth they meet in the program outside of programming time.



The program space meets or exceeds all applicable state and/or local health and safety guidelines and/or regulations.



There are no observable safety or health hazards in the program space.



At least one person with a current first aid certificate, including CPR, is present at all times.



Program space and equipment is clean, well-maintained, and free of hazards.



Adequate supplies and facilities exist for washing hands.



There is an emergency management plan in place including procedures for fire drills and natural or other disasters; all staff, youth, and their families are familiar with it. If the program is school-based, its plan will reflect the MNPS plan.



If the program provides transportation, there are established policies to transport youth safely; the policies comply with all legal requirements for vehicles and drivers.



Emergency information on each youth is on file and accessible.



Procedures are in place for dealing with sick or injured youth during programming time. A first aid kit is readily available.



Program space has adequate security in place.



Families are aware of notification procedures related to potential health risks/hazards and to program closure.

The program supports and protects the mental, social, and emotional health of all youth.



Younger youth have separate space from older youth as needed and appropriate.



Staff demonstrates awareness of and responds to the individual physical, mental, social, and emotional health needs of youth.



Supervised space is available for youth who need or want to work independently.

Youth are supervised during all programming and activities.



Staff know where youth are and what they are doing at all times.



Staff supervise youth appropriately according to youths' ages, abilities, and needs and the level of risk involved in an activity.



There are written guidelines for youth arrival, departure, and transition times.



A transportation plan is on file that includes the names of adults approved to pick up each youth.

When provided, snacks are well-balanced and nutritious.



Drinking water is readily available at all times.



Programs discourage the use of candy and "junk food" as incentives.



Youth are served a variety of nutritious and appealing foods in sufficient quantities.



Youth input is actively sought in selecting and preparing foods.



Youth allergies and other food restrictions are well-documented and taken into consideration in food preparation and service.



Healthy food and drinks that meet the guidelines of the Afterschool Snacks and Suppers section of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service are provided.

Relationships

The program develops, nurtures, and maintains positive relations and interactions among staff, volunteers, youth, families, and programming partners.



The program fosters a welcoming and comfortable environment.



The program reflects a culture of mutual respect and support.



The program promotes a supportive emotional environment (e.g., smiles, laughter, displays of warmth).



The program is sensitive to the cultures and languages of the youth and their families.



All adults use positive language, including tone and body language, that supports young people's growth and potential.

Staff and volunteers respond in positive ways to the individual needs of youth.



Staff and volunteers greet youth and their families upon arrival at the program.



Staff and volunteers respond to all youth in a warm, supportive manner (e.g., staff and youth seem relaxed; adults listen attentively and are intentionally inclusive).



Staff and volunteers encourage youth to ask questions and develop ideas related to their activities and interests.



Staff and volunteers are aware of and able to respond appropriately to the range of youth's abilities, interests, and emotions.



Staff and volunteers are actively involved with youth.

Staff and volunteers provide appropriate mentoring opportunities and/or role-modeling to guide the behavior of youth in positive ways.



Staff and volunteers model good social skills (e.g., listen, empathize) and positive adult relationships (e.g., cooperate, show respect).



Staff and volunteers help youth develop language skills through frequent conversation.



Staff and volunteers help youth develop good social problem-solving skills and positive social behavior (e.g., help them talk through social conflicts and negotiate solutions).



At least one adult talks with each youth on a daily basis (e.g., listens to description of weekend or day, including problems and successes).



Intentional one-to-one long-term mentoring relationships are provided to youth who want and need a mentor. This can be done through a partnering relationship with another agency.

Staff and volunteer relationships with youth are positive, supportive, nurturing, and consistent.



Staff and volunteers take responsibility for the greeting, integration, and departure of youth (e.g., greeting each by name, conversation on arrival, etc.).



Staff and volunteers positively reinforce youth and youth behaviors to build confidence and self-esteem.



Staff and volunteers use positive discipline methods effectively (e.g., giving attention to positive rather than negative behaviors, redirecting youth from unacceptable to acceptable activity).

Staff and volunteers encourage youth to make choices, become more responsible, and build a sense of purpose.



Staff and volunteers provide youth with multiple opportunities to choose what they will do, how they will do it, and with whom.



Staff and volunteers provide guidance to help youth make informed and responsible choices/decisions and resolve their own conflicts.



Youth have opportunities to become increasingly responsible for planning, implementing, and leading activities and programs.

Staff and volunteers provide opportunities for meaningful interaction and engagement with youth's family members, when possible and appropriate.



Staff use arrival and/or departure time to share positive information (highlighting youth successes) and develop relationships with family, where applicable and appropriate.



Staff and volunteers communicate with families regularly in positive and respectful ways (e.g., private conversations, conferences, calls home).



Staff, volunteers, and youth encourage families' active involvement in the program.

Staff, volunteers, and other program partners collaborate to meet the needs of all youth.



Staff communicates with one another regularly about the youth and their needs.



Staff communicates with volunteers and other program partners to ensure that the program flows smoothly and that youth needs are met.



Staff, volunteers, and other program partners are cooperative, collegial, and respectful of each other, providing role models of positive adult relationships.



Staff, volunteers, and other program partners share skills and resources with one another to help youth gain information and solve problems.



Staff and youth take initiative and share responsibility to ensure program quality.



The program has established good working relationships with appropriate local, state, and federal agencies.



Parent, volunteer, and partner meetings are documented with sign-in sheets, agendas, schedules, etc.

Youth interact with one another in positive ways and develop a sense of belonging.



Youth demonstrate good social problem-solving skills and positive social behavior (e.g., can negotiate solutions, make compromises, work together toward a common goal, empathize with others' feelings, and work cooperatively).



Youth feel connected to the program (e.g., use ownership language such as “our program”, hold one another accountable for rules and guidelines).

Programming and Activities

Programming and activities enhance the positive development of youth.



Programming and activities facilitate positive and respectful relationships, peer-to-peer and adult-to-youth.



Programming and discussions will promote youth's development of a sense of purpose.



Programming and activities allow youth to develop new skills. They have identified educational, social-emotional, physical or life skills outcomes.



Youth are encouraged to recognize their part in the wider community through community service, civic engagement, and/or service learning opportunities.

Programming and activities are relevant, engaging, varied, and flexible.



Youth have meaningful roles in program planning, development, implementation, and evaluation, at a level that is appropriate.



Programming and activities are responsive to the developmental and physical needs, as well as the learning styles, of the age groups being served.



Youth regularly give informal, verbal feedback on whether or not the activities and program structure are meeting their needs. Programming is flexible enough to act on this feedback.



Programming and activities have an appropriate schedule, flow and duration, including a balance of structured and unstructured time, as appropriate. They include use of indoor and outdoor space, where possible.



Youth have opportunities to learn through project-based or experiential and real-world contexts.



Programming and activities include the arts (art, music, drama, etc.) and hands-on science and technology opportunities.



Enrichment programming includes activities such as fieldtrips to zoos, aquariums, libraries, farms, etc. that expand youth's experiences and knowledge base.

Programming and activities are well planned.



There are enough materials for the number of youth in the program, as appropriate.



Materials are age- and culturally-appropriate, accessible to all youth, and used appropriately.



Staff and volunteers are well prepared to lead programming and activities.



Where appropriate, programming is based on scientifically-based research that provides evidence that the program or activity will help youth meet the state and local student academic achievement standards.



Formal curricula, where used, reflect state-approved standards and include linkages to the school day.



Programming reflects an effort to raise achievement scores in core subject areas.



The program schedule is clearly posted and followed. Schedule changes are posted and communicated to parents, volunteers, and partners.

Youth have opportunities to make choices based on their interests.



Programming and activities have a culture that allows youth to take initiative and explore their interests.



Youth have opportunities to choose an activity and to help plan how it will be carried out.

Youth experience and learn about respect and diversity.



Programming and activities promote teamwork and respect for others.



Staff expose youth to different life situations, viewpoints, and cultures through a variety of programming in order to promote appreciation of differences.



Staff use youth-centered approaches to guide behavior, reframe conflict and promote inclusive relationships.



Staff use an anti-bias approach to programming (i.e., intentionally working to break down cultural, religious, gender and ability stereotypes among others) and encourage all youth to participate in a variety of activities.



Programming and activities accommodate youth with special needs and encourage their active participation.

Program staff are thoughtful about influencing learning and increasing knowledge of youth.



Youth have opportunities to integrate knowledge and to apply concepts and processes within and outside the program.



Youth have opportunities to reflect on their learning and its application.



Staff guide each youth through a self-assessment of personal interests and goals.



Youth actively participate in activities and are working toward a product or goal.



Staff regularly recognize and celebrate individual youth achievements in relation to specific expectations.

Staffing and Professional Development

Staff and volunteers at all levels are qualified and well prepared to work with youth and their families.



Staff and volunteers meet the academic and experience qualifications as stated in the organization's written position description.



Staff and volunteers have undergone a thorough screening and background check. (various levels of security depending on location, etc.)



Staff and volunteers age 18 and above have undergone a thorough screening and TBI background check. High school volunteers must be supervised.

Staff and volunteers are familiar with their position and responsibilities prior to working with youth and their families.



Volunteer pre-service orientation at minimum includes:

- Review of organizational mission, goals, and programs
- Review of position description and responsibilities
- Review of health, safety, confidentiality, and emergency procedures, including the recognizing/reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect
- Introduction to colleagues, key contacts, and work environment
- Written organization/program policies and procedures, including program behavioral guidelines
- Written plan for further training, including Positive Youth Development



Staff pre-service orientation at minimum includes:

- Review of organizational mission, goals, and programs
- Review of organization/program policies and procedures, including program behavioral guidelines
- Review of position description and responsibilities
- Review of health, safety, confidentiality and emergency procedures, including the recognizing/reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect
- Review of record-keeping procedures
- Introduction to colleagues, key contacts, and work environment
- Written plan for further professional development, including training, supervision, coaching, and evaluation

Staff and volunteers receive relevant and appropriate training and attend ongoing professional development activities that support their own growth and build more effective program practice.



Training needs of staff and volunteers are assessed initially and then annually.



Relevant training for staff and volunteers is provided regularly, either on- or off-site, on a variety of topics, that might include: Positive Youth Development; conflict resolution; orientation to the neighborhood and community; stages of physical, social and emotional development; cultural competency; health and safety (CPR, first aid, pathogens); and engaging families.



Staff have access to professional development resources (e.g., organizational memberships, virtual learning resources, opportunities to visit other sites, release time, travel costs, conference fees)



Staff professional development activities are documented and on file.

Staff and volunteers receive the necessary support to work effectively.



Staff and volunteers are provided the necessary and appropriate work materials, physical space, and training and assistance to carry out their responsibilities.



Program strives to provide wages and benefits to promote stability and retention.



An accessible and responsive communication system is in place for staff and volunteers to provide input and voice concerns.



Staff meetings include planned opportunities for staff to share new professional ideas and materials with one another.



Program works with staff to help them achieve credentialing and certification, as appropriate.



Staff receives support in working with diverse populations (e.g., youth with disabilities or special needs, or youth of different genders, races, cultures, and religions).

Program managers assess performance and satisfaction among staff and volunteers, identify needs and facilitate improvement where necessary.



All staff receive continuous supervision and feedback, including written and shared performance reviews on a regular basis, but not less than once a year. Volunteers also have access to ongoing supervision and feedback.



Staff participates in a self-evaluation at least annually, which includes identifying training needs and goals.



Program managers provide team building activities and other opportunities to help foster a positive work environment.

Administration

Program policies and procedures are responsive to the needs of youth and their families in the community.



Program policies seek to make the program accessible and include procedures to reach out to youth and families that are not yet enrolled or involved in the program. Barriers to participation are addressed.



Program policies and procedures reflect inclusionary practices.



Staff/adult volunteer-to-youth ratios and group size are determined by activity and by age of the youth, so that the needs of the youth can be met.



Program serves youth who attend schools in need of improvement according to NCLB standards and who attend Title I schools where at least 40% of students qualify for free and reduced-cost meals.



Youth selection criteria, as well as registration procedures, are clear and well-documented.



Structured programming averages at least 12 hours per week during the school year.

The administration sets clear expectations for youth behavior and active, consistent participation, as appropriate.



A clear attendance policy is in place, as are specific strategies to retain enrolled youth



Youth and staff together develop guidelines for behavior (e.g., standards of respect and cultural awareness). There are clear policies for monitoring and enforcing these guidelines.



Behavior guidelines are displayed as appropriate, and new participants are oriented to the guidelines, ideally by other youth.



The program schedule and disciplinary policies are included in orientation materials distributed to youth and their families.



Discipline is documented with data showing the number and types of offenses, whether the number of offenses has declined or increased for each student, and the action taken.

The program engages families as partners in its success, where appropriate.



Policies allow family members to visit anytime during program hours and to engage the staff in private conversation, as appropriate.



Family input is sought in program policies and procedures, which are clearly communicated to all families at registration/orientation.



Family input in planning activities and reflection on practice is actively and regularly sought and documented.



Family-focused activities are scheduled at regular intervals.



At least two parent activities are offered per school year.

The program builds and sustains partnerships with the community, including schools, government and non-profit providers.



The administration pursues partnerships which offer diverse, engaging, and enriching programming/activities to youth while maximizing existing resources and minimizing redundancy. Opportunities for community members to support the program through financial support or in-kind donations are also pursued. Partnership agreements are in place.



The administration recruits, trains, and supports community volunteers from diverse backgrounds to conduct or assist in conducting the program, where appropriate.



Where appropriate, the program builds formal linkages to schools to align in-school and out-of-school time to create a coordinated and enriching day for youth; e.g., teacher communication strategies, participation in school activities.



Connectivity with the regular school day teacher and principal is documented using coordination sheets, meeting schedules, sign-in sheets, agendas, etc.



Collaborating partners include at least one school district receiving funds under Title 1, Part A, and at least one public or private community organization

The administration provides sound leadership and management.



Administrators involve key stakeholders, including staff, families, and youth in long-term planning, fiscal management, and decision-making.



Personnel files exist for all staff members and include, at a minimum, resumes, transcripts, and background checks.



There are policies and procedures related to the confidentiality of youth information and to the release of that information.



The administration regularly evaluates the program's equal opportunity hiring and staffing practices and uses equitable promotion practices for staff who achieve higher levels of professional development.



Administrators establish and support a continuous cycle of program quality improvement, which includes:

- Program quality is assessed against clear standards and indicators, using identified assessment/evaluation strategies.
- The program regularly and intentionally solicits feedback from youth and their families about the program; information is then fed back into activity selections, planning,

implementation, and relationships. Enrollment and participation data is tracked and monitored consistently as part of that feedback from youth.

- The program has a system for using information from its assessments/evaluations for learning and program improvement, as well as for measuring outcomes relevant to program activities.
- Assessment/evaluation results drive staff/volunteer training and professional development.
- Administrators share results of evaluation with staff, families, youth, and community, as appropriate.



Written job descriptions, work schedules, and employee timesheets are on file.



The administration has a demonstrated capacity to manage complex grant programs. An accurate accounting system is in place that itemizes monies spent and shows current balances. Copies of invoices and reimbursement forms are kept on file. Grant-funded equipment is inventoried, labeled and stored properly.



The administration ensures that staff keep accurate records of student enrollment numbers, daily attendance, and disciplinary offenses.



Programming is established based on an assessment of objective data regarding the need for such programs and activities in the schools and communities.



Program evaluation is based on an established set of both academic and behavioral performance measures.

Acknowledgements

Nashville's five principles of Positive Youth Development and the Nashville After Zone Alliance Standards of Program Quality are the products of a year-long process involving the Mayor's Office, Metro departments, the faith community, and a host of nonprofit youth-serving agencies, among others.

These entities contributed the time and expertise of their dedicated staff, both managers and front-line youth workers. In addition, these efforts were partially underwritten by:

- Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County
- Education First Fund of the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee
- A Quality Counts grant, received by Oasis Center
- A federal Healthy Communities/Healthy Youth grant, received by the YMCA of Middle Tennessee and its Center for Asset Development
- Federal Compassion Capital funding, received by the Youth Life Foundation

The standards and indicators were developed by the Quality Standards Workgroup, representing the following organizations:

- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Middle Tennessee
- Martha O'Bryan Center
- Metro Parks and Recreation
- Metro Public Schools
- Nashville Public Library
- Oasis Center
- Project for Neighborhood Aftercare
- STARS Nashville/Kids on the Block
- Tennessee Dept of Education Office of Learning Support
- YMCA of Middle Tennessee
- Youth Life Foundation

The standards and indicators were built upon Nashville's five principles of Positive Youth Development. These principles were developed and adopted by representatives of the agencies listed above, along with the following additional entities:

- Agency for Education Partnerships
- Alignment Nashville
- Boys & Girls Club
- Community Nashville
- Davidson County Sheriff's Office
- Fraternal Order of Police
- Fifty Forward
- Girl Scouts of Middle Tennessee
- IMF/Peniel Initiative
- Junior Achievement
- Metro Housing Authority
- Metro Public Health

- Nashville Career Advancement Center
- Preston Taylor Ministries
- Rejoice Ministries
- Rocketown
- Salama Urban Ministries
- Sexual Assault Center
- Ultimate Goal
- United Neighborhood Health Service
- Youth Encouragement Services
- YWCA of Middle Tennessee